

County was named for John Stokes (1756-1790), a native of Lunenburg County, Virginia, who served as an officer during the Revolutionary War. After the war, he moved to Montgomery County and later to Rowan County. Stokes was a member of the North Carolina General Assembly and was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1789.

In 1849 Stokes County was divided by the creation of Forsyth County, creating the current configuration of the county. Court continued to meet in Germanton until a new county seat could be established. The new county seat of Stokes was created on the Dan River just east of the Sauratown Mountains in the center of the county. It was named Crawford in 1851, but in 1852 the name was changed to Danbury. Danbury remains the county seat and center of government.

The topography of the county limited the practical size of many farming operations in the county, as it still does today. Stokes County farms during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typically cultivated corn, wheat, oats, animal fodder, fruits (especially apples), garden vegetables and raised primarily swine, cattle and sheep. Tobacco was, as is still is, the primary farm commodity produced for trade and was the centerpiece of the local economy.

In the period just prior to the Civil War, Stokes County shared in the economic development experienced by the rest of the state and nation. Land values increased and there were some instances of marked prosperity by a few landowners. The 1850 census listed 591 farms with an average size of 281 acres, 56 acres of which were under cultivation. In contrast a small number of farms grew to over 1000 acres. A group of large and impressive Greek Revival plantation houses from this period have been documented by the efforts of the Stokes County Historical Society.

During the Civil War Stokes County was not the scene of any battles or major conflicts unlike other locations in the south. Near the end of the war General Stoneman's cavalry invaded the county and set up camp in Danbury during April 1865, during a sweep through the mountains and Piedmont. It was soon determined by the General, that there was little war effort in the area, there were few reprisals, and the troops left after only one day. During and after the war Stokes County did suffer from a drain on manpower and resources, having provided the Confederacy with many soldiers, food, clothing and other supplies.

The primary effects of the Civil War on Stokes County were felt in the post war years. The counties agricultural production experienced decreased production for a time and revolution in land holdings and the labor system. After the war farmers lacked capital and credit for repairs, replacements, operations or expansion. The 1870 census recorded a significant drop in crop production, especially for corn and tobacco, over the amount recorded in the 1860 census. By 1880, the production of these crops had regained or surpassed former levels. Tobacco production in particular had dramatically increased, suggesting the county was making a strong post-war recovery. By 1880 the county was the fifth largest producer of tobacco in the state. Much of this tobacco found a market in Winston, which helped to fuel the growth of that town as